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ABSTRACT

This book provides 101 ideas and strategies to empower overall marketing efforts: (1) "Put On Your Thinking Cap" (e.g., define the problem before marketing it, set reasonable goals, and create a niche); (2) "Secrets to Boost Your Marketing Power" (e.g., emphasize the benefits, check out the competition, and sell oneself in as many languages as possible); (3) "Marketing Materials: Tools and Tips to Do the Job Better" (e.g., make a brochure, get mentioned in other brochures, and make it easy to phone for information); (4) "Going Beyond the Basics to Increase Enrollment" (e.g, offer volume discounts and guarantees and give away tuition); (5) "Specialty Tips for Programs at Large Institutions" (e.g., make sure the Web site is easy to find, partner with other educational programs, and get the program mentioned in the calendar); (6) "The Power of People: A Human Touch to Increase Enrollment and Polish Your Image" (e.g., build loyalty with host families, establish win-win relationships, and follow exceptional service standards); (7) "Continue Marketing While Your Students are Enrolled" (e.g., meet students at the airport, partner with local businesses, and create happy memories); and (8) "How to Keep Marketing Once Your Program is Finished" (e.g., create an alumni network, review successes and failures, and plan ahead for next year). (SM)

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101 WAYS TO MARKET YOUR LANGUAGE PROGRAM

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A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR LANGUAGE SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS

SARAH ELAINE EATON

FL 027775

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101 Ways to Market
your Language Program

a practical guide
for language schools and programs

Sarah Elaine Eaton

101 Ways to Market your Language Program

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"As knowledge is acquired it must be organized and put into use, for a definite purpose, through practical plans.

Knowledge has no value except that which can be gained from its application toward some worthy end."

Napoleon Hill, Think and Grow Rich

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I am pleased to have the opportunity to share my work with you in this book. My belief in the work that I do and dedication to it are a result of a strong personal and professional passion I have for the value of spreading the word about educational opportunities for students around the world.

I think that when you discover your inner passion and gifts, you have a responsibility to use them. This book is the result of that passion, the joy my work brings me, and a desire to share it with more educators and administrators.

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Introduction

As government and institutional funding for language programs decreases, it becomes increasingly important for schools to spread the word about their courses in order to maintain enrollments and keep new students coming through the doors. This includes post-secondary institutions, private language schools, non-profit organizations and any other type of school offering language programs that people pay for. The problem is that most language program coordinators and managers have little experience or training in marketing. They juggle administrative (and sometimes even teaching) duties with student recruitment and program promotion. Most know that student enrollment is a priority, but making time and allocating resources for marketing their program take a backseat to more pressing needs. Some believe that business terms and ideas such as "marketing" have no place in education.

The problem is, the need to market and promote programs in order to keep enrollment flowing is a challenge that does not – and will not – go away. This book is designed to offer low-cost, easy tips and tricks that language program managers and coordinators can use (and delegate!) to boost marketing efforts.

Although many language programs use the services of recruitment agents, we have designed this book around you and your staff. Our objective is to give you ideas and strategies that empower your overall marketing efforts.

It is important to note that there are different kinds of marketing. There is the marketing that is targeted directly to the students or the person paying for the services you offer. Your website would be an example of this. Then, there's a secondary level of marketing that people sometimes forget. This is the kind of marketing that ensures that you have a presence in the marketplace. It is unlikely that this type of marketing

will drive hoards of students to your door, but it will ensure that your competitors and others who may refer students to you know that you exist. It's the idea that if people don't know you are offering a service, they are not likely to buy from you. You need to have a market presence. For example, by having an ad in the phone book and by advertising in directories and other brochures, you will ensure that the world knows you are offering a language program. You will be seen as a leader in your field and a serious, credible program.

Remember that marketing and selling are two different things. Selling focuses on closing the deal, often as quickly as possible. Marketing is about developing an image and a presence in the market place and ensuring that people know about your school. Marketing is a longer-term activity and requires an investment of both your time and your energy.

One way to use this book is to choose a few ideas that you feel would be effective for your program. Make a note of the person or people responsible for putting the idea into action and a date by which you will follow up to see how the idea was implemented and what effect it has had on your program. For example, if you like the idea of gathering testimonials from students to use in your marketing materials (Idea 84: Let your students market for you — collect testimonials from students and get their permission to use them.) Make a note that says, "Jane to gather 20 testimonials by October 31." Then, follow up with Jane in early November to see how she has progressed. After she has gathered the testimonials, the next step is to integrate them into your brochures and website. The final result is that your marketing materials have a ring of authenticity about them that will attract more students.

This brings us to an important note about gender use in this book. We have chosen to use the masculine for some examples and the feminine for others. This is simply to add variety and avoid the cumbersome use of "he/she." We have chosen the genders for our examples randomly and tried to use

masculine and feminine equally throughout. As your student population and staff probably includes both genders, so do our examples.

As you read through these ideas, imagine how they could impact your program. But don't stop there. Put them to work. A speaker I heard once said, "Until you put your ideas into action, you're just hallucinating." I encourage you to use this book as a starting point that will lead to action. Your dedicated, strategic action and efforts will lead to results and increased enrollment for your program.

Happy marketing!

Sarah Elaine Eaton

Part One:
Put on your thinking cap

1

Define your program before you market it

Before you begin to market your program, print brochures, create a web page, etc. you need to be clear about exactly what it is you are marketing. How many different types of programs does your school offer? Are they evening programs, intensive academic programs, tutorials? I have been surprised how many times I have asked program coordinators and managers about their programs and they can only answer in vague terms. Listen to the difference between these two possible responses:

"Oh, we do a bit of everything..."

or

"We offer part-time programs for teens and adults from the beginner through advanced levels. In addition, we run a successful workplace learning program, specializing in the manufacturing industry with workers mainly from Asia."

The person who can give a 10-second definition of his program is more likely to have a clear, directed marketing approach that will fill seats and increase enrollment.

Some people would call this a mission statement. That's another way of thinking about it, but the idea of developing a mission statement can be overwhelming to some people, so I like to keep things simple and clear.

The bottom line is, if you can't define what it is that you do best, nobody will know. Take a few minutes to write down the most important points about your program and courses. Then check with others at the school to see if they would agree. Your objective is to come up with a short, concise definition of your overall program.

2

Create an image for your program

Think about what you want your prospective students to imagine when they see your marketing materials.

Is your program based on strict academics, intense cultural immersion, workplace learning or a fun holiday program? Once you have determined what image you want for your program, you can proceed to create that image through the photos, fonts and layouts that you choose for your marketing materials. For example, a fun holiday program does not need a coat of arms on its letterhead, but a program based on serious academic study may benefit from a more traditional image. What is the image you want to create?

The creation of a program or school image is one that you may want to develop through a committee. The input from various committee members can help you clarify what message you want to send out to the world and what you want to avoid. Your committee can include a variety of perspectives such as administration, teaching staff, even students and alumni. Considering input from someone with training in branding or marketing may be helpful, too.

Remember that it is easier to create an image from the beginning, than it is to change an image that has already been established. Your aim is to create a strong image for your program so that when prospects and competitors see your marketing material they quickly associate it with your program.

3

Set reasonable goals

Generally, the smaller your program, the more capacity for growth you have. It would not be unreasonable to expect a 100% increase in enrollment in one year if your program had only 10 students. However, if you are already at 200+ students per year, you will need to set a realistic goal for growth through your marketing program. Generally a 10% to 20% growth rate is an attainable goal. That would mean, if you currently had 200 students you could set your goal to 220 or 240 and you could very well reach that by following some of the suggestions in this book.

For the first year, set modest goals for your marketing program. Let your entire administrative team and teaching staff know what the program's goals are. An example might be, "Did you know that last year we had 200 students enrolled in our program? It is our goal to increase that number by 20% this year. We're going for a total enrollment of 240 students and two extra classes. Ask us how you can help!"

If you do not know how many students you had enrolled in your courses over the past year, now is the time to find out. This is the kind of information you want at your fingertips so that when you are conversing with colleagues and business associates, you can mention both your current enrollment and your plans to increase it. By doing so, you will not be giving away too much information, but rather you will look like a strong leader with a sense of vision and purpose.

Imagine saying to your colleague, "Last year, we had 150 students. Our strategic marketing plan includes a 10% growth rate. We are expecting to reach 165 students enrolled before the end of the year." Doesn't that sound good? Well, that could be you talking in your next business encounter, providing you have your figures straight.

The idea is to spread the word about what your marketing goals are so that everybody can help your school reach its potential for that year. By keeping your goals reasonable, your staff, instructors and others around you will be motivated to help you reach them.

4

Identify your target market

Whom do you want to register in your program? For example, if your program caters to students 18 years of age or older who have completed high school, then that is your target market. You need to appeal both to them and possibly to their parents, depending on who is footing the bill.

If your programs are filled with workers sponsored through workplace learning programs, your target market may not be the students themselves, but the companies who sponsor them.

When it comes to marketing materials, rarely does one size (or shape or color or format) fit all. For example, if you have a program designed for seniors, it is unlikely that your web marketing will be the most effective tool for them, unless they are a particularly techno-savvy group of elders. A good, old-fashioned brochure printed on good quality paper may be an excellent marketing tool for that group. But for students and young professionals, web marketing is essential.

Also, you may want to consider the language you are using for different groups. A group of high-achieving professionals may be more interested in the end-result of registering in the program, so using words like "results", "benefits" and "achievement" may be appropriate. On the other hand, students looking for a holiday tour with a language study component may be more interested in the "experience", the "immersion" and the "fun".

Once you identify your market, you can tailor your marketing materials to that target group and watch the registrations roll in.

5

Carve yourself a niche

Offer language courses for specific purposes. Is there something that your school does better than any other in your area? Do you have a program for foreign language teachers? Do you offer a specialized course in veterinary language or business language? If you have at least one course or program that differentiates you from other schools, you can focus on being the best there is for that specialty. You can still keep basic language training or other programs, but having a specialized niche will ensure you a unique market share and add both revenue and students to your program.

These courses also deserve special attention in your marketing plan. For example, if you offer a program for language teachers from foreign countries, you could easily research the contact information for language schools abroad and add that information to your database. Then you have the tools to do a targeted direct mailing campaign to those schools that would catch the attention of those teachers and school administrators.

Generally, it takes longer to see results for specialized programs. That is because it may take prospects longer to find out about your niche and respond to your marketing. If you persist, within a couple of years, you can have a booming program. The trick is to carve yourself a niche and be patient while the world discovers your uniqueness.

6

Be honest about how much you are willing and able to invest in marketing

One of the major pitfalls of marketing plans for language programs is that directors and coordinators are given little or no budget to work with. Time and time again I have heard, "We have no money for marketing!" The reality is you are going to need to spend money marketing your program or you won't have a program for very long.

Being brutally honest about how much of your resources you can allocate to marketing will help you target your dollars in the most effective way. The first step however is sitting down with a calculator and figuring out exactly how much you have to spend.

There are varying theories about how much an organization should spend on marketing to be effective. It is important for you to decide, together with your staff and school administrators or owners, how much you are willing to invest. Bringing all the players to the table may be a difficult task in itself, but if you are serious about marketing your program, you need to be serious about how much you really have to work with to get the job done.

One place to start may be to look at your gross income for last year and use 10 - 20% of that for marketing. This may seem like a lot, but if you can grow your program another 10-20% (a conservative estimate) you will have made your money back.

7

Price your program powerfully

Figuring out how to price a program can be tricky. It can be even trickier to adjust the price of a program that has already been established. If your price is too high, prospects may balk. If your price is too low, they may think that it is poor quality. It doesn't pay to offer bargain basement prices if you pride yourself on quality. What do you include in your pricing? Books? Homestay? Excursions? Make sure that you list on your marketing materials what is included in the price. Some schools charge extra for students to take exams, so if your school doesn't, be sure to list that.

If you tell prospects exactly what they are getting for their money, they are more likely to understand what they are paying for and they will be more likely to buy. Here's an example of what you could write:

Our price includes:

- 25 hours of instruction per week
- books and learning materials
- CD ROM of practice activities
- homestay (including 3 meals per day)
- medical and accident insurance
- all tests and exams
- graduation ceremony
- certificate of completion
- final written evaluation of your performance

By pricing your program powerfully and letting students know exactly what they are getting for their money, you will gain both respect and increased enrollment.

Part Two: Secrets to boost your marketing power

8

Have your current marketing materials audited

Ever heard the expression, "He couldn't see the forest for the trees"? It refers to someone who loses his perspective on a situation because he is too involved (and invested) in the situation to see it clearly. This is what can happen when you market your program. You may think that your current brochures, web page, etc. are just fine... but what do others think about them? Do you really know?

If you have your current marketing materials audited, you may get a clearer picture of what outsiders really think of your materials – and your program. An audit is usually conducted by an impartial third party. This probably means hiring a marketing professional or educational consultant to review what you currently have. What she will probably do is review and assess how you use branding (i.e. your logo and image), how you convey the information, how consistent your materials are and finally, how you can make your marketing more effective.

There are hundreds of marketing consultants out there. It may benefit you to hire someone who specializes in educational or international marketing so you can get the best assessment possible.

9

Assess your current program demographics

Do you know what countries your students come from? Better yet, can you articulate what percentage of students are from which countries? Although most program coordinators or managers could tell you where the bulk of their students come from, you might be surprised how many do not know basic statistical information about their own programs.

Most programs keep statistical information in some form, either on registration forms or in a database. Of those, few actually use the data for any real purpose. If you have statistical information, it really is worth the time and effort to compile it into useful reports that can help you assess who has been registering in your program over the past little while.

I suggest that you go back at least 3 to 5 years to compile your data. You want to know which countries students are from, how old they are (age range and average age), as well as the ratio of males to females. If you have information on education or occupation, include that too. The idea is to build yourself a "big picture" of who is registering in your program.

After you have that picture, you can assess whether or not the demographics you *have* fit the demographics you *want*. For example, if you have mainly female students and you think some gender balance would benefit your program you could tweak your marketing materials to attract more males (i.e. appealing to all-male schools or sports teams, for example.) An analysis of your student population costs you little money, just an investment of your time. It could be a job for a student assistant or clerical member of your team during your quiet season. It's an investment that could help your program grow in phenomenal ways.

10

Use the KISS principle in all your marketing materials

The KISS (Keep it Short and Simple) principle applies both to the amount of content and its presentation in your marketing materials. The first step is to eliminate unnecessary words. Next, review your document to ensure that the words are short, simple and easy to understand.

Some word processing programs tell you the reading level of the documents you write. For example, in my version of MS Word, I can do this by accessing Tools > Spelling and Grammar > Options > Show readability statistics. This shows me the grade level of the text. For most marketing documents, a grade six or seven reading level is recommended. That's for native speakers! Remember that you are marketing to people whose first language is not the same as yours. If the reading level comes out higher than grade seven, your sentences may be too complex to sell effectively.

Avoid colloquialisms in your international marketing material. For example if you were an ESL student, what would you think if you read, "...homestay families will look out for students..." in a brochure? Does that mean "keep vigil over them" or simply "protect them as their own parents would"? Review your marketing materials to ensure they follow the KISS principle. You will find that students are more interested in your program because they understand what it is about.

11

Write your marketing materials using "you"

Many programs use third person plural i.e. "the students" or "they" in their marketing materials. This weakens your marketing edge because it puts perceived distance between you and your prospect.

You are promoting your program to the person reading about it, so speak to that person directly. This is a marketing and communications technique that brings the product or service closer to the individual, and connects it to the client in a personal way. Consider the difference between these two statements:

Students will be taken on interesting excursions every Friday afternoon.

You will go on interesting excursions every Friday afternoon.

Do you see and feel a difference between these two statements? If the second statement has more impact on you, then you understand the power of speaking directly to your prospect.

One technique for writing marketing materials is to envision one single person you would like to enroll in your program (or it could be a current student if he or she fits your vision of the ideal registrant.) Then write your marketing materials as if you were speaking to that person directly. You will be amazed at the powerful marketing materials you can produce.

12

Be positive in all your marketing materials

There's a theory that says if you project negativity, you will get negativity in return. So if you fill your marketing materials with what is not possible and what the program will not provide, chances are you will not attract very many students.

Scrutinize your marketing materials looking for negative words (no, not, never, can't, won't, shouldn't, don't etc.) Then, change the sentences to give them a positive spin. For example, "Classes are no larger than 15 students" can be changed to: "Your class will have a maximum of 15 students."

Another classic example: "Don't hesitate to contact us" can be changed to a positive statement, starting with a strong action verb: "Contact us today to reserve your place in our course!"

By the very nature that our schools often have strict policies and procedures, we find ourselves mentioning what can't be done and what is not allowed. Tell your students what you *will* provide, what they *will* experience and what they *can* expect. Focus on a having a positive, simple, upbeat tone, filled with action verbs.

When you fill your marketing material with positive, energetic words and you are likely to generate positive feelings in your prospects. That could lead to an energetic, "Yes, sign me up!"

13

Focus on the benefits

Marketing materials are meant to draw in customers. You want to show them how they're going to benefit from your program. This does not mean making false promises, but it does mean showing them what they will learn, how they will grow and what they will experience. Consider the difference between these two statements:

Our program is 13 weeks long and we offer classes at the beginner, intermediate and advanced levels.

Whether your level is beginner, intermediate or advanced, we have a 13-week comprehensive program to fit your needs.

The first statement is a description focused on the program. The second is a persuasive statement focused on how the student benefits from having a comprehensive program at the right level for him.

Too many educational marketing materials focus on describing programs, rather than outlining how students can benefit from them. Sometimes, lots of information is given, with no indication to the student that he will actually benefit from any of the services provided.

What do your own materials say? Do they highlight the benefits of your program? If not, now is the time to re-work them.

14

Promise only what you can deliver

There are no two ways about it, education is a competitive business. A huge factor in your reputation is credibility. As programs and schools jump on the marketing bandwagon, there is a temptation to promise more than you can deliver. There is no faster way to lose a good reputation than by disappointing your customers, who in this case are your students.

Promising fluency in three weeks or ensuring students a certain score in internationally recognized tests is a bad way to market your program. A more effective way is to show students what they will be learning and the benefits they will receive. You can do this by including a syllabus in your promotional package and on your web site.

Be honest about the kinds of activities and excursions you take them on. Don't promise them they will go whitewater rafting and horseback riding unless you actually plan to take them. (By the way, it is a good idea to check with your insurance policy before endorsing extreme-risk activities for your students.)

Many language schools do promise only what they can deliver, only to work with the occasional agent or representative who inflates the promises while they are promoting the school abroad. It is worth your while to review all literature your agents plan to send out on your behalf, even if that means hiring a translator. Your credibility is on the line and it is your responsibility to ensure that prospects are getting a true picture of your school before they sign up.

Another way to boost your credibility is to outline on your web page exactly what students can expect from your program. That way, it is clear and you will show that you are being accountable to your students and to your own sense of credibility.

15

Check out the competition

It is worthwhile to check out the web sites and marketing materials of other language programs. That way you can find out what it is about their sites that you like and why. Then, see how you can incorporate similar aspects or qualities into your own page (without copying of course!)

For example, if you find yourself spending more time on a particular website because you find it easy to navigate, assess the organization of the site and incorporate elements of its organization into your own site. If you like the photos in another school's brochure, ask yourself what it is about them you like. Do they have more close ups? Excellent gender balance? More group shots? Compare those photos with photos of your own program and see what improvements you can make.

Examining the marketing materials of other schools will also give you an idea how much they charge and what they offer. You will be able to see if your prices are in line with other programs that are similar to yours. This can help you price your program powerfully. (See Idea 7: Price your program powerfully.)

Beware of the assumption that because you know that your competitors exist that you also know all about their prices and how they present themselves to the world. Prices and marketing tactics can change. Take the time to examine and assess your competitors' marketing materials and price structure. I recommend reviewing your competition's marketing materials annually. Schools grow and change focus on a regular basis. If you are aware of what is going on around you, you will be better prepared to market your own program successfully.

16

Sell yourself in as many languages as possible

Translate your marketing materials into languages of the countries you want to target.

Imagine this: Your daughter wants to go away and study a foreign language... maybe Chinese or French or some other language that you don't speak. She tells you that she has found two possible schools and wants you to have a look at their websites. She sends the links to you at the office. During your coffee break, you check out the first school's site. All the information is written in English. You find out about the school your daughter wants to attend, the teachers who work there, the homestay accommodations available and the program she will be taking.

You move on to the second site. All the same information is there (you think?) but it is written only in the language your daughter wants to learn. You surf around, look at the pictures and try to get back to the home page again.

After you've looked at both sites, where do you want to send your daughter?

The fact of the matter is that both schools can have an excellent quality program, but if students (and their parents) can read about it in their own language you will build an unspoken relationship of trust with them. It's both perception and perspective. You trust what you know.

I strongly recommend translating your web site (or at least major points of it) into the languages of the major markets you wish to penetrate.

17

Go on, be a drip!

They say that we need to see an advertisement at least seven times before we are likely to buy a product. If we transfer that idea to marketing language programs, what makes us think that we can simply send out a brochure to a student and suddenly she will want to register in our program?

The "drip theory" recommends regular, repeated contact – at least six or seven times — with a prospect to ensure that your name sticks in her mind. This does not mean sending out six or seven of the same brochure! But how about sending a brochure, followed a week later by an invitation to register, followed by a couple of monthly newsletters? If you get an e-mail address for the prospect and you can send monthly updates about what is going on in your program, you will be using yet another medium to show your prospects that you have not forgotten about them.

Ideally, you want to combine different types of contact: mail, e-mail, phone calls and personal contact. This is not always easy in an international marketplace, but do try for repeated contact in a variety of ways.

If you don't get any response after several tries, then you can change the prospect from active to inactive in your database. In any case, you are more likely to get more registrants by using the drip effect than by sending one initial brochure and nothing else.

18

Figure out your most successful marketing strategy

Ask your students where they heard about you. This is a simple way of determining which method of marketing works for you. Do most of your students find out about you through the Internet? Word of mouth? Your brochure? The trade fairs you go to? Once you figure out what has proven most successful, you will know where to focus more of your marketing dollars.

I suggest getting this valuable information in writing. Whether it is through an evaluation form or an exit interview where the results are recorded, get the information in concrete written form. Compare it from year to year. See if your most successful marketing strategy changes over time.

Often word of mouth is the most powerful way to market your program. If the majority of your students come to you through this way, then you are very lucky.

But what other marketing efforts are successful for you? You may be surprised. You may be pouring thousands of dollars into a fancy brochure and find out that 85% of your students used the Internet to find you. If that's the case, you would want to drive more of your marketing dollars into the Internet (maybe pay for a higher ranking on a search engine or get a banner ad). Once you know what has proven successful, you can use that information to generate even more interest and registrations.

Part Three: Marketing Materials: tools and tips to do the job better

19

Have letterhead and matching envelopes for your program

This sounds like such a basic idea, but often programs use outdated letterhead or letterhead that pertains to their parent organization, rather than their own program. Your program deserves its own letterhead, with matching envelopes. These do not need to be expensive, but they do need to show your current address, phone and fax numbers, e-mail address and web site. If your school is part of a larger organization, such important contact information for your particular program may not appear on your letterhead. Sure a school crest looks nice, but if students use the address listed on the letterhead and that letter takes longer to get to you because it isn't addressed specifically to you, you may be losing students.

To go along with the letterhead, have matching envelopes in different sizes. Too often, I have seen programs with matching standard #10 size envelopes, but when it comes to the larger envelopes that are used to mail out program information and brochures, only plain simple brown envelopes are used. Sometimes, in the busy office environment, staff may forget to make labels for the return address.

Your program stationery is part of your image. If you intend to market your program properly, start with the basics. Ensure you have a complete set of stationery, with up-to-date contact information and encourage everyone working in the office to use official stationery for all correspondence, no matter how informal.

20

Encourage staff and faculty to promote the program

Give staff and faculty their own business cards. Often, I have heard that schools or programs consider it too expensive to give out business cards to staff or faculty. What a crock! These people are ambassadors for your program. They talk to people all the time about what they do, where they work or what they teach... in business meetings, at family gatherings, at social events.

Consider these two scenarios:

One of your teachers meets a foreign man at a social event. He wants to send his son abroad to study languages. He begins to talk to your teacher about the program and is impressed with what he hears. He asks for your teacher's card so he can contact him for more details. Your teacher says, "Oh sorry... I don't have a card... Let me write down the e-mail for you on a napkin.... Ummm... Do you have a pen, by any chance?"

One of your teachers meets a foreign man at a social event. He wants to send his son abroad to study languages. He begins to talk to your teacher about the program and is impressed with what he hears. He asks for your teacher's card so he can contact him for more details. Your teacher says, "Of course! Here you go. All the contact information is right there. If you e-mail us at the address listed, we can get an information package out to you right away. We'd be delighted to have your son study with us!"

Of course, you can list general contact information for the school on all the business cards, so that anyone who contacts you can either request program information or be directed to the person whose name is on the card.

In the big picture, business cards are not expensive when you consider the incredible marketing force your staff and faculty can be for you. Not only will you build loyalty to the program, you will portray the respect paid to each person on your team by providing them with the tools necessary to endorse your school. Order business cards for each and every member of your team today.

21

Make a brochure ... or 5... or 10

Another important part of your marketing package is your brochure or "family" of brochures. Do you promote your program with photocopied brochures printed off a word processing program or do you have glossy, four-colour brochures complete with photographs? The type of brochures that you have will depend on your budget. Nevertheless, it doesn't pay to scrimp on your promotional materials. If your marketing materials look unprofessional, people will think your program is unprofessional too. Moreover, having materials printed can actually be less expensive than running sheets off a photocopier.

If you offer more than one type of program, then you may want more than one type of brochure. For example, if you run a language program for students and a workplace learning program, you will need different brochures to promote them.

If you offer a particular program geared towards more than one market, you may want different brochures to target different audiences. For example, one school in Canada offers an intensive English as a Second Language Program that they market to Canadian francophone students from Quebec, as well as to international students. They have two different brochures for the same program. Each one is tailored to a specific market.

Make as many different brochures as necessary to effectively target your market and promote your program. In doing so, try to create a "family" of brochures that share a similar look and project the same message about your program. You may benefit from working with a qualified graphic artist on this project.

22

Print more brochures than you think you will need

There are two reasons to print more brochures than you think you will need. One is that the price per unit of printed material drops significantly when you order larger quantities. Be sure to get price quotes from various printers. Ask for quotes for the minimum you think you will need. Then add 500... 1000 or 1500 extra to that number and do a price comparison. Figure out the price per unit and you will probably find that it is worth it to print more, rather than less.

Secondly, if you think you will send out 3500 brochures, and you go with a print run of 5000, you will be motivated to find innovative ways to market your program, so as not to waste the excess. In one case, a school asked the manager of a local grocery store if they could display brochures at the front door, along with other community publications. The store manager agreed and the school found their brochures disappearing much more quickly than they expected. They were able to get the word out to more people and not waste brochures. And it didn't cost them a penny.

23

Get mentioned in other brochures

Become part of larger organizations and have your program's name and logo appear in their brochures. These can be organizations dedicated to teaching standards, cooperation between schools or even your local Chamber of Commerce. The more places your name and logo appears, the better.

One of the challenges of this type of marketing can be that as your program grows, you may move to new facilities, change phone numbers, e-mail addresses or other contact information. Instead of letting the other party contact you every so often to ask if your information is still correct, I recommend that you keep a detailed list of every organization who mentions you in their brochures. Send them your newsletter and stay in touch with them on a regular basis. (See Idea 37: Send your newsletter out to the world.)

When you change any information, send them a letter to let them know. Ensure that you keep your contact information (including e-mail and website) and your logo current in all these brochures and they will continue to be an effective marketing tool for you.

24

Make it easy to phone for information

Have a direct phone number for your program that is easy to remember. Think about phoning your program from abroad. Do students need to go through a secretary, or even worse, a switchboard? Use the phone as part of your marketing, sales and student relations operations. It can be a powerful communications tool. The easier you make the tool to use, the more likely people are to take advantage of it.

Think about how you might feel phoning a foreign language school for information. Sometimes even figuring out international phone numbers can be a pain. The added stress of going through a switchboard can be intimidating for many people.

Ensure that students can phone your program directly and not go through a switchboard or be transferred around. It may take some negotiating, but it is worth it to work with your local telecommunications company to get a phone number that is easy to remember.

Once you have an easy-to-remember direct phone number, publish it in all your marketing materials. Remember to include your country code, area code and if applicable, your city code, too. Make it as easy as possible for students to phone you from anywhere in the world.

25

Make phoning for information even easier

Set up a 1-800 number. A toll-free number can be a powerful way for prospects to reach you. While the toll-free number may be in effect for certain regions or countries only, it does allow anyone calling within those areas an easy and effective way to get information.

In addition, it will be easier for agents and partner institutions to contact you.

The very fact that you have a 1-800 number speaks volumes about your commitment to your students. You will look like a professional operation that cares enough about its students to offer them the very best. By having a 1-800 number you will project a polished, professional image that will set you above the competition.

26

Use signage to lead customers to your door

Few language schools have the luxury of owning their own building. Most are housed in other, larger buildings. If this is your case, you want to pay special attention to the signage in and around the building. If students get frustrated just trying to find your office, they may not be in the mood to sign up when they finally get to talk to someone.

Ensure that your school is listed on the directory of the main floor. If there is no directory, get permission from the proper authorities to put up a sign. Explain that the majority of your clients do not speak your language and that signage is essential.

When prospective students get off the elevator or leave the stairwell at the appropriate floor, have signs with arrows pointing them to your front door.

If you are unsure where to place your signs, walk into your building and imagine you are a foreign student. Better yet, take one of your students with you and ask them for suggestions. Then place signs in as many key areas as necessary to lead prospects to your door.

Signs do not have to be expensive. Although it does look more professional to have well made signs, don't let a tight budget stop you. Print signs with your office printer if you need to. Or give them a more "polished" look by having them laminated. Make your office as easy as possible to find and students will be happy to come and sign up in person.

27

ESL@... Make your e-mail address easy to remember

In this age of user-friendly everything, having a long, complicated e-mail address can turn prospects off. They may write to a school with a simpler address just because it is easier. Although they may have the intention to write to all the schools, the ones with the simplest address my get the first opportunity to hook students. Your e-mail address should be as simple and straightforward as possible.

If your current e-mail address is not simple, I recommend getting an updated, simpler version anyway. Send out notification to everyone in your database that your e-mail has changed. (This can be a way of "dripping" noted in Idea 17: Go on, be a drip!)

Keep your old e-mail address for a minimum of 2 years. Lots of people may still have it on old brochures and so forth. If you get rid of the address, you may lose them. Instead, have all mail from the old address forwarded to the new address. That way, you will be sure to get any mail sent to you.

28

Create an outstanding website

For international marketing, a website is an essential marketing tool. It does not need to be the latest in high tech. In fact, it is probably better if it is not. Web pages that load quickly in most browsers (especially older versions) are best for an international audience. Not everyone is at the same technological level, so by working with a reasonable level of technology, you can be sure to reach as many people as possible.

Having said that, your website should still be comprehensive, informative and detailed. This is your sales pitch to the world! Having a professional look and design will be worth the investment you put into it.

Apart from your program information and some other suggestions we give you later in this book, consider adding links to local, provincial or state tourist sites. Links like this are usually available free of charge and can give your students more perspective on what they can see and do while they're there.

Other possibilities include linking to services that give local time, weather conditions and news. Again, these are usually free and can make your website seem interactive, up-to-date and "alive". Remember that your students may have only a vague idea about where you are located and what life is like there. By adding in these links, you create a bigger picture for your prospects and make them feel more comfortable before they even arrive.

Make sure that your web designer uses appropriate meta-tags and title for your web page. These are the key words search engines look for on your web page. This is an important part of development that will allow your site to be easily searched by various engines.

Update your web page regularly - at least once a month. Include new photographs, upcoming events, etc. By keeping your web page current, it will seem more attractive and alive to students.

29

Invite visitors to bookmark your website or make it their home page

If you want people to remember your site, put a line on your home page inviting them to bookmark it. A good web designer can program a button students can click on to make your page their home page.

They may not want your page to be their home page forever, but while they are getting ready to enroll and while they are studying with you, they will be very excited about their new experiences. By having easy access to your web page, they will be able to get information quickly and effectively.

In addition to making it easier for them to access your page, you will get more hits on your page, which is always a good thing.

30

Get registered on search engines and web directories

It is not as low cost as it used to be to register with search engines and ensure that you have a top spot in the rankings, but it is a good investment of your marketing dollars if your market is international. Get a list of as many search engines and directories that you can find. Target the ones you want to focus on (depending on cost or location, for example).

Make a list of all the directories and search engines to which you submit your information. Then go back and check after a few days or weeks (depending on how long they tell you it will take) to ensure that your site comes up when you search it.

It is crucial to have excellent meta-tags and a clear title for your web page. Your web designer can help you with this. When you list your meta-tags, you want to think like a student and include words that your prospective customers are likely to search. Meta-tags that include your country, city, English (or French or Spanish or whatever language you teach), etc. will probably get you more hits than abbreviations that students may know about such as ESL, FSL, etc.

Remember to get your site listed on local and provincial or state directories, too. These are often free listings and will help to promote you within the community.

31

Have your program mentioned on other websites for free

Many educational websites will promote other educational sites for free. Your only investment is the time it takes to seek them out and get listed on their registries or in their databases. The same goes for some government websites.

Although having your program mentioned on other websites may not be the best way to get students to enroll in your program, it is an inexpensive way to increase your visibility and show your competition that you leave no stone unturned.

Many of these directories are run by organizations dedicated to education. By having a presence in the directory, you will ensure that you have a presence in your educational community at large and your marketplace.

32

Create a promotional CD-ROM or video for your program

Typically, promotional CD-ROMs or videos are marketing tools that schools would produce for agents or other recruiters. They are more expensive than brochures to produce and still need to be updated on a fairly regular basis (every two to three years at least.)

They can also be used at your own information sessions, given to partner institutions or other groups interested in working with you.

A CD-ROM or video should go beyond the information posted on your website. It can include footage of classes, excursions or activities, a message from the director and greetings from the staff and faculty. As well, interview students to find out what they liked best about the program.

The length of the CD-ROM or video will certainly depend on your budget. It pays to do some comparison shopping before having one produced. Get references from the companies who provide you with price quotes and make sure that you get a contract outlining all the terms of the project. You will want to research and then specify in your contract technical criteria such as international formatting or coding for videotapes or CD-ROM. These formats can change from country to country, so make sure your promo piece can be accessed by people in the countries you are targeting.

Giving prospects a visual picture of your school will create a powerful and lasting image in their minds that may eventually lead them to enroll.

33

Get your program mentioned in local / provincial / state / national directories

There are many directories produced by government, non-profit and other organizations that list educational programs of all kinds. Often, having your school or program listed requires nothing more than for you to contact them and request that your information be included.

The first step is finding out what directories are out there. Secondly, see if you are already listed in them. If you are, verify that all your contact information is correct and up to date. If you are not listed, write or call and ask what you need to do to have your information listed. Submit the information as they request. Finally, ask if you can have or buy a copy of your own directory for your records.

Keep a list of all the directories that your school's information appears in, so that you can keep track of your efforts.

34

Advertise in local ethnic newspapers and directories

Most major cities have ethnic newspapers or special directories of businesses and services geared towards that community. You can create a local presence by advertising in as many of these local directories as appropriate. In fact, I have found some online directories that do not charge for this service, as long as what you are promoting will serve their particular community.

It pays to have your advertising translated into the languages of the various directories. So, for a directory that serves the Chinese community, have your ad translated into Chinese. For the Italian directory, have your ad translated into Italian, etc.

If you produce ads that are not time sensitive (i.e. they do not discuss program dates) you will be able to re-use the same ad in future versions of the same directory or other directories that also serve the same language group.

35

Send out promotional post cards

Besides text-heavy brochures, a simple post card of your program with a photo of the latest graduating class, an exciting excursion or your new computer labs can be a powerful marketing tool.

On the reverse side you can leave it blank and write individualized messages or print the times and dates of upcoming classes.

Post cards are easily pinned to bulletin boards or tucked into daytimers as a reminder to register. If your post card has a photo with students in it, you can be sure that those students will show it off to family and friends. What a great way to get some word-of-mouth marketing happening!

36

Publish a newsletter about your program

A monthly newsletter is an excellent way to stay in touch with alumni and let prospects know about upcoming events and classes.

A newsletter can be produced by your office staff or handled by the students, with faculty supervision. Having the students produce it can provide them with an excellent learning opportunity. Of course, your newsletter will have to be proofread and edited for content. That's where the faculty comes in. They can ensure that the content is high quality, excellent writing that represents your program well.

A good newsletter will contain articles as well as information that relates directly to the organization. Include interesting articles related to language learning, international affairs, community activities and multiculturalism. For fun, you can include a few tips on language learning, crossword puzzles or other language-related games, too. If you borrow material, ask for permission to use it and include the appropriate credits.

Last but not least, include clear, crisp photos of recent activities in your program with upbeat captions.

You can have the same format for your newsletter from month to month, including a standardized header, same size paper and your school's colors. This will give you a professional touch, even if the newsletter is produced by students. Remember to always include the date or volume and issue number, for an even more professional image.

37

Send your newsletter out to the world

Once you have created your newsletter, you will want to develop a database of contacts or at least a mailing list of your "subscribers". Your list will be made up of anyone with a connection to your program or an interest in it. For example, you may want send it to:

- current students
- alumni
- homestay families
- former and current staff and faculty
- agents
- community contacts
- other organizations who mention you in their brochures (See Idea 23: Get mentioned in other brochures)
- anyone else who may be interested in your program

Besides being an excellent way to stay in touch with prospects and let people know what is happening with your program, it is another means to create a presence in your community.

38

Remember the Yellow Pages

Placing an ad in your local Yellow Pages is essential because it ends up in every home, every office and every hotel room. Anyone curious about language programs in your city will almost certainly take a browse through the Yellow Pages.

Although a regular listing will ensure your presence, it may not get you noticed. If you upgrade to an advertisement, you may stand out from the crowd. Regardless, you want to invest in this one medium that reaches just about everybody in your city, as well as the tourists who visit.

If you place only one ad in a year, make the Yellow Pages your top priority.

39

Put your program on the map to bring business home

Think about studying the language of a country you have never visited. Imagine looking at brochures for different programs. You look at the contact information and find that each program is located in a different city, none of which you are familiar with.

Chances are you may have an idea where the country's capital city is located, but you may not be as familiar with the location of other, smaller cities. Unless you live in an internationally renowned city you can give your students a sense of where they will be studying if you include a map of your country in all your marketing materials. Be sure to highlight the city or cities where your program takes place. This will help increase their sense of where they are going.

You may want to include the distance to other major centres in your country to give them an idea how long it will take them to get there if they wish to visit other centres before or after studying with you.

Putting a map on your marketing materials is an excellent way to orient students and make them feel comfortable.

40

Develop a database that can be a marketing gold mine

Many language programs have excellent potential to develop a strong database of clients and prospects. The thing is, they don't do anything with those hundreds of pieces of paper or business cards floating around in files and in-baskets or buried under a pile of papers on a desk.

Many schools use a computerized registration system that keeps data on the students enrolled. This is an excellent place to start, but you want more. You need mailing lists of contacts, other schools, homestay families and anyone else interested in your program. You want to find out who is interested in your program, where they are located and what category (student, homestay family, agent, etc.) that they fit into.

There are various database programs out there. Some are easier to use than others. If you do not already have a database program, research the various types that are available before you buy. Your staff need to be able to use it easily and quickly.

Keep your database alive and well. Use it to generate mailing lists for your newsletters, statistical reports that will give you essential marketing information and so on. Think of your database as your living link to real people who have an interest in your program. Nurture the database so it grows and helps you promote your program.

Part Four: Going beyond the basics to increase enrollment: Be pro-active, not reactive

41

Offer a volume discount

If 10 or more students registered in your courses from a particular school or company, would you give them a discount? How about 15 people? Or 25? If you are willing to give a discount for volume registrations that are all received at the same time, then make it known!

It is easy to include a line on your website and in your printed marketing material that says, "Contact us about our volume discount for 10 or more students."

Then, when someone does contact you, have a one-page information sheet available to send by fax or e-mail outlining the terms of your discount policy. You can stipulate, for example, that all registration forms must arrive at the same time or that all registrants must be from the same organization, etc.

By offering a volume discount, not only are you offering a benefit to groups who register at the same time, but you are also letting your competitors and everyone around you know that you are pro-active in your marketing. It's another way to be a leader in your marketing efforts.

42

Offer a guarantee

If you have make claims in your marketing material that you know are true (see Idea 14: Promise only what you can deliver), then you can be confident making a guarantee to your students. It may be unwise to promise quantitative results, but what you can say is something like, "We guarantee the highest quality learning experience for all our students. If, after completing the program, you are unsatisfied, we will refund your money."

A guarantee like this makes it clear that it is valid only for those students who complete the program. You want to be sure to protect yourself, while backing up your service.

It is a good idea to have a lawyer verify that the wording of your guarantee is appropriate. Chances are, very few will ever ask for a refund. If someone does ask for a refund, be sure to give it. The mere fact that you offer a guarantee will increase your credibility in the eyes of your prospects.

43

Take part in a trade fair

International educational trade fairs can be a great way to connect with other professionals in the industry, talk to prospects and their parents and distribute your marketing materials on a large scale.

If you take part in a trade fair in a foreign language country, your efforts may be wasted if you don't have someone working at your booth that can speak the local language. It pays to hire a translator or have former students work at your booth with you. (See Idea 45: Invite alumni to work at a trade fair booth).

If you have never attended a trade fair before (or even if you have) it pays to do your homework before you go. Read up on how to make the most of your trade fair experience from the many books and Internet articles that are available. Ask the fair organizers who will be there and how many people have attended this fair in the past.

Some trade fairs organize 15-20 minute meetings between schools and agents at some point during the fair. If your school uses agents, you will want to get in on this activity, as it can be a valuable way to make numerous contacts in one day.

Get as much information as possible about the location of your booth in the trade fair setting. It may be worth it to pay for an upgrade to a corner booth or something closer to the front entrance. Estimate how much marketing material you can reasonably carry with you. Ask if it is possible to send brochures ahead of time. Prepare yourself as well as you can before you leave and your trade fair experience will be successful.

44

Do a pre-trade show marketing campaign to draw people to your booth

Trade shows in and of themselves can be hectic. You may not have a lot of time to spend with excellent prospects. Try these pre-trade show marketing tactics to draw prospects to your booth:

- Send out letters inviting prospects to visit your booth at the trade show.
- In your invitation letter tell your prospect that you will have a special gift waiting for them, but they must come in person to pick it up.
- Then, deliver on your promise. Bring enough small gifts such as books or tasteful souvenirs from your country to give away to the prospects you wrote to. You will make even more of an impact if you have each one individually wrapped and addressed to each prospect.

In your letter also let prospects know if you will be available to meet during times other than the trade show itself. Book appointments for breakfasts, suppers or evening cocktails before you leave so you can make the most of your time abroad.

45

Invite alumni to work at a trade fair booth

By inviting alumni to work with you at your trade fair booth, not only are you hiring someone who speaks the local language, but you also have someone working along side you who can give a first-hand account of her experiences.

Several weeks before the trade fair, write to all alumni who live in or near the area where the trade fair will be held. Invite them to come by the booth and say hello, telling them how much you would love to see them again. Let them know that there are opportunities for two alumni to work at the booth for one or two days. Tell them you would love to have her be one of those two representatives at the trade fair.

You may think that you will get inundated with responses, but chances are you will only have a couple of responses anyway. If you get four or six volunteers, even better. Alumni can work in shifts and not get tired.

You can follow up with students who had a particularly positive experience in your program by phoning them or e-mailing them directly to ask again if they would consider working your booth with you.

Some schools ask alumni to volunteer and they are lucky enough to get responses. If you offer to pay your alumni a nominal fee in local currency and treat them to a meal at the end of the day, you are showing that you respect their time and efforts. These "living success stories" can bring you more new enrollments than any brochure, so it is a worthwhile investment.

46

Organize or take part in an educational trade mission

Trade missions differ from trade fairs in that they tend to focus on you moving around the target country, visiting schools and other organizations that may be interested in partnering or promoting your program for you.

Trade missions usually involve a group of delegates with a common purpose (you are all from the same province or state or you all focus on adult learning). Costs and resources are shared, making it less expensive for everyone. Missions can be organized by umbrella organizations such school boards or the government.

If you are interested in taking part in a trade mission and can't find an upcoming one for an area you would like to target, contact a local government branch for international trade and see if you can collaborate to organize one together. If you take the initiative to spearhead the mission, you will position yourself as a leader and gain even more opportunities to get your program known.

47

Lead the way by following up with all contacts

This is a crucial step in marketing and sales this is often overlooked. The fact is the follow up call or letter can be the key to developing long lasting business relationships. Let's face it: many of us will meet hundreds of people in a professional context every year. How many of those people followed up with you? You are most likely to remember those who followed up, rather than those that did not.

If you take the time to go to a trade fair or take part in an educational trade mission, make a point to follow up with potential leads as soon as you get home. After returning home from a trip, there is usually a big pile of work to catch up on when you get back. But sometime within the first couple of days, take time to send a thank you letter or a hand-written post card with a photo of your city on it. Or even take some postcards from home with you and write them during the plane ride home so they are ready to mail as soon as you get back. Make the first move to stay in touch.

After that, you can use the drip effect to remind people that you are still thinking about them. (See Idea 17: Go on, be a drip!)

48

Give away school supplies with your program's contact information on it

Promotional items with your school's information on it can last much longer than a brochure. By giving away promotional items that relate to your industry (in this case, education) your name can reach the far corners of the world and people will see it every day as they use your promo item. Excellent items for promoting your school or program include:

- pens
- pencils
- rulers
- book bags
- note pads
- scribblers or note books

The trick is to select a promo item that people will use regularly and so, keep your name fresh in their minds. The other factor will be your budget and what price per unit you are prepared to pay for your promo item stash.

After you have selected a promo item, be sure to include all your program contact information on it, including your website and e-mail. Then, give these items away to prospects, students currently enrolled and anyone else with an interest in your program.

49

Give away tuition

Volunteering prizes for local and international draws and contests (at a trade fair, for example) can be a great way to increase your profile. You can give away tuition for a particular course or a credit that can be used towards any course.

Don't be fooled into thinking that this means giving away an entire package for free – though if you can manage that, go for it! Most programs cannot afford to give away books or homestay. If you offer a prize for free tuition, add the terms stating that books, homestay and excursions are the responsibility of the student. That way, you can increase your profile in contests, give away a legitimate prize and not lose revenue.

Look to your local community, as well as trade events to give away tuition in contests and promote your school.

50

Create gift certificates for your program

Gift certificates are excellent way for family members and program alumni to encourage others to register. They do not need to be complicated to produce. You could do it with your office printer.

Add in a few security measures like printing them on special security paper or giving each one a number (and keeping a list of master numbers in a safe place) and you are on your way. Add even more security by having each one personally signed by the school's director.

Remember to promote the fact that you offer gift certificates. Put a notice on your web page or a "click here to buy a gift certificate" button. Advertise your gift certificates in your newsletter and brochures.

51

Learn the business customs of international clients

If you are negotiating with school officials from another country to bring a group of students to study at your school, you can win an even more lucrative contract if you are thoroughly familiar with the customs of your prospective clients.

Most school directors and even coordinators know stereotypical tidbits about many cultures. But what do you really know about the negotiating tactics and business customs of the cultures who bring you big revenue? It is never too late to increase your knowledge so you can build rapport and bring in even more students.

When you understand how your counterparts think, process information and make decisions, you are in a better position to negotiate effectively with them. Don't rely on the tidbits of information you have picked up along the way. Instead, take time to research the business practices and negotiation tactics of these other cultures. By doing so, you will position yourself to negotiate a better contract for both of you. The efforts you put into learning and studying the fundamentals of the other's business culture can benefit you greatly.

52

Distribute your brochures far and wide

Most programs have mailing lists that they use to distribute brochures. This is not the only way to get the word out. Here are some other suggestions for places to distribute your brochures so they can reach a wide audience:

- airports
- grocery stores
- tourist offices
- embassies and consulates abroad
- embassy and consular offices located in your city

The best way to have your brochures displayed in these kinds of places is talk to the people in charge. Ask them if they will display your brochures free of charge. If they say yes, ask how many they would like and how often you should drop off more copies.

Then, follow up on a regular basis, ensuring that the brochure racks are always full.

53

Host an open house

An open house is an excellent way to educate people in your community about your program. Host it when classes are in session so visitors can tour your facilities to see students and teachers in action. Refreshments are a must for any open house, so be sure to order enough finger food and beverages for the entire duration of the event. Send invitations to colleagues, host families, former teachers and staff, prospective students who may live in your city and alumni. Ensure staff or volunteers are on hand to:

- take visitors' coats and welcome them
- offer tours
- offer food and beverages
- replenish drinks
- direct visitors to the washroom

A great time to host an open house is on the anniversary date of your school or program's opening. For the open house, staff and volunteers may want to wear name tags or school T-shirts to identify them to visitors.

By offering a draw for promo items with your logo or for free tuition (See Idea 49: Give away tuition) you will create a sense of excitement among visitors.

This can be a big event that involves staff, faculty and student volunteers. By getting lots of people involved in the organization of the open house, you will lighten the workload and create a sense of excitement for everyone involved.

54

Offer information sessions about your program

An information session differs from an open house in that it is a more formal presentation and probably won't last as long as an open house. Information sessions can be arranged for:

- prospective students and local family members
- agents or others interested in representing your program abroad
- prospective homestay families
- other staff and administrators who work at your institution (See Idea 66: Maximize inter-departmental marketing)

Have people pre-register for the information session, so you can add them to your database.

A typical information session would be about 45 – 60 minutes in length, with time for questions afterwards. You could use a simple 5-W format to organize your presentation:

- Who you are (Mention the names of school founders and current administrators, giving details of the total number of staff and faculty.)
- What you do (Including a brief statement about what your teaching philosophy is.)
- Where you are located (Mention other branches or satellite schools if you have them.)
- When you offer classes
- Why your program is excellent

Using overhead transparencies or a Power Point presentation can add visual interest to your presentation.

At the end of the information session, have brochures and registration forms available and invite prospects to sign up right then and there. Have some refreshments available after the session, as it will encourage people to linger and mingle, giving you and your staff the chance to chat with them personally afterwards.

For those that want to think about it before registering, have a marketing package ready for them to take away.

Information sessions can be an excellent way to generate interest, increase enrollment and sign up new host families.

55

Show off the expertise of your staff and faculty

In many programs, staff and faculty receive less recognition for their talents and professional expertise than they deserve. You know that your staff is comprised of highly qualified individuals with diverse backgrounds and great personalities. So why not show that off?

When one of your staff members participates in a conference, publishes an article or contributes anything significant to the profession or the community, let others know about it For example, "Ms. Jane Black will be representing our school at the provincial conference for language learning."

Congratulate them in your newsletter. Another example might be, "Mr. Bob Miller has been asked to participate in a community task force on immigration in our city."

Publish it on the web. "The National Bulletin for Language Teachers has just published an article written by our very own Ms. Sue Rogers."

Put a notice on your bulletin board. "Mr. Bill Armstrong has been elected to executive of the state organization for teaching professionals."

By doing this, you will increase a sense of pride among not only among the staff and faculty, but also throughout the entire school. This will make everyone feel great and proud to be associated with your program.

56

Participate in professional organizations and associations

Many provinces and states have associations dedicated to the language teaching profession. Are all your instructors members? Do you encourage them to represent your school by participating on committees and for the executive of professional organizations?

Many teachers who work on contract do not enjoy the luxury of receiving bonuses or benefits. But what a wonderful gesture it would be to reward teaching excellence by paying their membership fee to a professional association.

Then, these people will be happy to represent your school and your program. They will be proud to spread the word that they work for you. Your school will gain greater respect and a stronger presence in the community by having its teachers play an active role in professional organizations.

57

Host a conference / professional event

Most professional associations have annual conferences or quarterly professional development seminars. Why not volunteer your school to host such an event?

If your local professional association does not have any upcoming events you could host, why not talk to your faculty, and ask for workshop ideas they would be willing to present? Then propose a workshop to be offered in conjunction with your local professional association. This can be your school's way of sharing some of its expertise with other teachers in your community. Besides, it gives your instructors the opportunity to do a professional presentation to their peers and add another line to their own resumes.

You can use your classroom space or meeting facilities to welcome other industry professionals and raise the profile of your school at the same time.

58

Different packages for different audiences

We have already talked about the need to have different brochures for different types of programs. (See Idea 21: Make a brochure ... or 5... or 10). Now let's take it a step further. You need different marketing packages for different audiences.

Having a series of cover letters in different languages or a set of brochures in different languages is one place to start. Pre-made packages for agents (complete with your video, CD-ROM and 10 or more brochures) can simplify your marketing to agents, for example. Having another pre-made package for schools and another for individual requests can speed up your response time as well.

The point is to think about who is receiving the package and what they might want and need. Then, tailor your marketing package appropriately.

59

Make it as easy as possible for students to register

Think about your registration process from the point of view of a prospective student. Is your registration form easy to understand? Do you offer help with visas, if appropriate? Make it as easy as possible for students to register by having a clear, simple registration process that students can access:

- in person
- by post
- by phone
- by fax
- by e-mail
- via your website

Having online registration is essential. It should be a simple form that can be sent by clicking on a "submit" button. Students should receive an automated response stating that their form has been received and they can expect more information from you soon.

Make paying easy by accepting cash, cheques (as long as they come from a local bank account), major credit cards, money orders and wire transfers. Have an easy-to-follow, step-by-step, one-page instruction sheet for making wire transfers (complete with bank account numbers) to send to students who wish to pay by this method.

In short, the easier you make it for students, the more likely they are to register.

60

Offer online preparation or follow up courses

Online courses can be the perfect way to prepare students to take part in a traditional face-to-face program. Students will be introduced to your teachers and course material in the online environment. By the time they arrive, they will already have an excellent understanding of how your school teaches and what will be expected of them.

Online courses can also be an effective follow up after students have already graduated. They can continue the learning process and stay connected with their fellow alumni.

Online courses designed to complement your existing programs not only benefit students, but give you another stream of revenue and more diverse program offerings.

Online courses do not need to be expensive to develop, although they can be if you make them highly multi-media. They can be simple, straightforward courses taught by your own instructors. We know that online learning may never entirely replace face-to-face learning, and nor should it, especially for communication or languages. Having said that, online courses are an excellent alternate way of learning and of generating revenue for your program.

61

Target foreign schools and universities

In one marketing campaign, a school targeted over 700 Latin American universities with a direct mail campaign that included a cover letter in Spanish and a brochure about the program. The letters were directed to the presidents or international relations officer of the university. Many universities wrote to say thank you for the information and that they would make it available to students.

One unexpected twist was that the president of one of the universities called to personally register in the program. He came from Central America to Canada to take part in the program and established excellent relations with the program and its staff. By the next year, together with the president of the Canadian university, he had signed an agreement of academic cooperation between the two schools that would foster relations between them for years to come. Not a bad result from one direct mail campaign.

I can verify this story is true because I was the one coordinating that campaign. We spent weeks preparing our mailing list and stuffing envelopes. Having a cover letter in the language of the schools we were targeting helped immensely. It meant that whoever happened to receive the mail could understand what we were saying and was more likely to pay attention.

Of course, this would not be the outcome of all direct mail campaigns. But the point is if you target foreign schools and let them know what you can offer their students, you may be surprised at the results. This tactic can work for universities, colleges, technical schools, secondary and junior high schools and even children's programs.

62

Partner with other institutions

Partnerships come in various forms. One objective of a good partnership is that it benefits both parties involved. What schools or institutions around you could you partner with to create a win-win situation for both of you? Is there a local arts school where students could take a dance class or learn how to work with clay? Is there a business school nearby that would host students for a day to give them the experience of studying business in your community? How about a cooking school where your students could go for a day to learn to prepare a local dish?

The opportunities for inter-institutional partnerships are endless. The trick is finding partnerships that will benefit both your students and the other school. Then you will need to collaborate to work out the administrative details to make it happen. This is usually the step where most schools lose interest. Working out the details of a partnership requires one person to make the first move, which can be a feat in itself. More importantly, it requires follow up, purposeful meetings and a plan of action.

You are starting a business partnership together, just using an educational model instead of a business model. Nevertheless, think of the parallels: you will invest time and energy in your start up. Then, you must monitor progress and work towards making your partnership goal a reality. Only when you go through these steps will you create a successful partnership. But it can be done and it is worth it.

If you can establish effective partnerships with other schools, you will be giving your students a unique experience and increasing your program's profile in the community.

63

Give a small program the personal touch

Smaller programs have a unique opportunity to offer personalized attention to students and prospects. The more you can add a personal touch to your program, the faster it will grow. For example, the school director, president or owner can send personalized cards, make visits to classrooms, and mingle with students at special events.

Imagine this: you are a student in a foreign language program. At a special festival time such as Christmas or some other special holiday you receive a hand-written card addressed to you personally (no computer label!) from the director of the program. How would you feel? Would you keep the card and show it to your family and friends when you got home? Would you feel you were special and cared for and not just a number?

Another idea if you have only a few students is to have all staff, faculty and administrators take the time to learn students' names and where they are from. Then, use their names and give them a warm smile as you do business with them. An example might be, "Good morning, Mei. You would like information about the next course?... Sure, here you go." Or as you pass a student in the hallway, "Hello, Pedro. How are you today?"

This personal touch can have a lasting effect on students. If you can make the time to make students feel special, the rewards will be huge.

Part Five: Specialty Tips for Programs at Large Institutions

64

Make sure your website is easy to find

This is the single most powerful tip for programs at large institutions. As an educational marketing consultant who specializes in language programs, I am often surprised (even appalled) at the red tape international language programs have to go through to ensure their website is easy to find. On one school's web site, I spent 15 minutes looking for the language program. I knew the school had one and I like to think that I know how to navigate the Internet pretty easily. I thought to myself, "If it takes *me* this long, and I know exactly what I'm looking for, a foreign student who doesn't speak the language is never going to find it!"

Your website is a major marketing tool for international students. If you rely on foreign students for the majority of your enrollment and revenue, it is essential that you have a website that is easy to access. Ideally, there should be a button on the school's home page that links directly to your program.

Unfortunately, many large schools have policies regarding their websites and how they are organized that do not benefit international language and culture programs. If this is the case in your school, write a proposal to change that. Meet with the appropriate governing body. State your case strongly and get the support of your superiors. Easy access to your website is a must if you intend to market your program effectively.

65

Partner with other educational programs at your school

If your school offers business, computer or science programs, these could be excellent partnership possibilities. Why not organize entire joint programs that offer some language and some specialized, hands-on training? Students could do simple experiments, learn how you use technology in a new way or take tours of local businesses to get a feel for how business is done in your community.

You do not need to organize these activities yourself. By partnering with other programs, you can let them take care of the activities and classes related to their area of expertise. You can prepare a language program for students with specialized vocabulary and language to help them.

Although most of us language buffs would be delighted if students would study with us for the pure joy of learning another language, the reality is that most of them want to learn a second language not only to enrich themselves personally, but also to advance themselves professionally. If you can appeal to this desire to help them improve their possibilities of getting a job later on, you will attract students to your joint program.

Imagine how proud a student would be to show off a certificate that showed she took part in a language and business study joint program? And proud she should be... for having learned another language and for gaining professional training in a different country that will expand and deepen her knowledge and increase her chances for a job. Partnerships can be an excellent way to establish a niche for your program and offer more diverse programming. (See Idea 5: Carve yourself a niche - offer language courses for specific purposes).

66

Maximize inter-departmental marketing

Inter-departmental marketing is a useful tactic that is often overlooked by language programs at very little cost. Here are some suggestions:

Send copies of your brochures to every single department. Include a letter from your department head or manager, briefing them on what the program is about. Invite them to send you students who may benefit from your programs.

Meet with anyone representing the school abroad. Make sure they know about your program and give them brochures to take with them. If the school has a preferred travel agent, make sure they know about your program, too. That way, they can help you promote it.

Place regular notices in the school's newspaper (both the staff and student papers). This will help educate others as to what programs you have and remind them that you exist. Use the school's Intranet to send out messages regarding upcoming programs and special events.

Invite department heads, coordinators and staff of other departments to an open house designed to educate them about your programs. (See Idea 54: Offer information sessions about your program.)

67

Become a part of your school's orientation program

Many large schools have orientation programs for incoming students. This may include tours of the school, activities for students to get to know each other, an introduction to the library and many more things. Offer to contribute your program's promotional school supplies to welcome packages. (See Idea 48: Give away school supplies with your program's contact information on it) By giving something away, you will be establishing an even better rapport with orientation organizers. Remember to ask them to include your brochures or promotional post cards, too.

Negotiate with the orientation organizers to have students from your program take part in the school's annual orientation. This may mean working at an information booth or even better, participating in icebreaker activities with other new students. Your students will feel more like they are part of the action. The rest of the students at the school can meet foreign language students. Your students get to practice with native speakers who may be about their own age. And your students will get to know the school better than if they found out on their own.

Students who come from abroad often grumble about not getting enough practice with native speakers. They are surrounded by native speakers all day, but the people with whom they form real connections (apart from their teachers and homestay family) are their classmates – other people learning the language. This is because they do activities with them and talk to them outside class time. If you give your students a chance to do activities and interact with students who are also native speakers you will be enriching their experience tremendously.

Using a direct mail campaign to target foreign schools is also an excellent idea if you have a professional development program for language teachers. Tailor the campaign to appeal to teachers, telling them about your courses in methodology and linguistics and you may just increase your registration dramatically.

68

Get your program mentioned in the school calendar

If your program is located at a large institution then it deserves to be mentioned in the school calendar. Calendars are updated on an annual basis, so even if you're not listed this year, get listed for next year.

This may involve cutting through some red tape, as schools have strict policies about what types of things are listed in what calendars. For example, if your program is considered non-credit and the school's main calendar focuses only on credit courses, you may have a hard time getting your program listed. If this is the case, I would encourage you to become a strong advocate for your program, by means of letter and proposal writing and stating your case in person before the committee who decides what goes into the calendar.

Most schools these days have an interest in global or international education. If your program draws foreign students, emphasize how you actively contribute to school's goals for internationalization. If need be, show revenue statements to prove how your program contributes financially to the institution. Make a case that for the minimal space you are requesting in the institutional calendar, it may benefit the school both quantitatively (in terms of revenue generated) and qualitatively (in terms of enriching the student population with students from around the world and helping the school reach its goals for internationalization.)

If possible, you want your own listing in the table of contents. The more you are buried under subheadings (or worse, not listed in the table of contents at all) the harder it will be for international students and prospects to find you.

The idea is to create a presence in your own institutional community and so, increase your perceived credibility. Not to mention that as the calendar is distributed to other schools and agencies around the world, you will also increase your international presence.

If your program is credible enough to be hosted at the school, it is credible enough to be listed along with all the other programs and courses in the calendar.

Part Six:
The power of people: Use a human touch to increase enrollment and polish your image

69

A smile is universal and patience is priceless

Have frontline staff who love their jobs. Imagine you are arriving at a foreign language school for the first time. The first person you see speaks quickly, points down the hall with frustrated gestures and whenever you try to ask a question says, "What are you saying? I can't understand you!" It's like he hates his job. And it shows.

Now imagine that the person who greets you smiles at you, listens attentively to your questions, speaks slowly, makes sure that what he has said is clear and walks with you to wherever you need to go. These are the signs of a person who is used to working with people whose first language is different from his own and who just loves his job.

The instant that visitors, prospects and first-time students walk through the door they will form an opinion of your program based on the treatment they receive. You want to ensure that the people working the frontline like what they do, remember to smile to people when they come into the office and never act as if they don't have time to serve those who ask for help.

In business, we call this "customer service", but in education we don't like to think of our students as customers. The reality is that if they are paying for the course, they are customers as well as students.

It may benefit your frontline staff to have some "customer service" training to learn how to make an excellent first impression and quickly develop good rapport with students. The educational model will probably always differ from a pure business model and if the term customer service rubs you the wrong way, think of it as training in human relations and communi-

cations. It is basically the same thing. The bottom line is the "golden rule". Have your frontline staff treat the people they see in exactly the same way they would like to be treated if they found themselves in a foreign country, trying to get information in a language they do not yet fully understand.

70

A picture says a thousand words

Use excellent quality photos of your students and program in your marketing materials. In the age of digital cameras, it is easy to take photos in an instant and put them up on the web. While I certainly encourage having a photo gallery on your web site, don't be fooled into thinking that a digital camera can replace a professional photographer.

A pro photographer can capture the spirit of your program in an instant. And she will know how to use lighting, shadows, angles and backgrounds to create the best image for your program. I recommend having a professional photographer once every 3 years or so to take photos of:

- your students relaxing on school property
- your students in class
- your students on excursions or participating in activities
- the school's facilities
- the graduation ceremony or year-end party
- your school staff, faculty and administration (See Idea 71: Use photos of faculty, staff and administration in your marketing materials to give your program a human touch.)
- a typical homestay family and their home

Excellent quality photos will project an image of quality too. Isn't your program worth it?

71

Use photos of faculty, staff and administration

Many language program brochures and websites show photos of students and facilities. By the time your prospects enroll, most of those students will be long gone. The people who are constant from course to course are the staff. And these are the people your students will be dealing with every day, so why not personalize your marketing materials with photos of them, and even a short one-line bio. "This is Jane Smith. She teaches advanced French." or "This is John Brown. He guides students on their weekend excursions."

That way, even before students arrive they will start to form a connection with people who work in the program. When they get to your school, they will recognize the staff they have seen and will immediately feel more comfortable and more welcome.

72

Have a welcome letter from the highest authority you can get. Then publish it!

You will add a touch of prestige to your brochures and websites if you have a welcome letter or introductory message from a person in high authority. The higher up, the better. People you could ask include:

- the Program or School Director
- university and college deans
- school owner or president
- local politicians (especially those interested in languages, education or international marketing)
- the mayor

You might be surprised who is willing to support a reputable language program, especially if it draws international visitors to your city.

If you get more than one letter of support then go ahead and publish them both. It looks even better!

And remember to get a head-and-shoulders photo of the person who wrote the letter. Publish the photo alongside the letter.

73

Build loyalty with your host families

A great way to build rapport with your host families is to include them in school events or host an event in their honour. A Sunday afternoon picnic in a local park with all students and host families is an inexpensive idea that can be fun for everyone. A welcome social or a farewell party are also excellent ways to include host families.

Your students will learn a great deal about language and culture from your host families. It pays to treat them well and include them in school activities. That way, you will build a mutual bond of loyalty with them and your program will benefit in the long run.

74

Add photos and biographical profiles of your best host families to your website

Giving details about homestay families will both entice prospective students and set their parents' minds at rest. They will have an idea about what families and homes in your community are like. You will appeal to their sense of family, home, safety and the need to be protected and accepted.

Remember: marketing has more to do with how you make your prospective students feel than what you are actually selling to them. If they feel good about it, they will want it.

Ask homestay families for written permission to use their photographs and biographical information on your website.

75

Ask host families to help you market your program

Many host families may already be helping you to market your program indirectly through their conversations with friends and co-workers. Others may simply say, "Oh we're hosting an international student."

Sometimes if you don't ask, you won't receive. It is perfectly OK to ask your host families to help you market your program. You could ask them to:

- take a couple of brochures with them to the office and post them on the bulletin board in the lunchroom
- put a notice in the company newsletter about your language program
- put a blurb in their church bulletin about the program
- post a brochure or notice at the local sports arena, gym or dance studio

By asking your host families directly for their support, you may be able to reach areas of your community where you wouldn't otherwise have a presence.

76

Establish win-win relationships with other language schools

Often, we think of other language schools as being our competition. At the same time, the people who work there are our professional colleagues.

It pays to develop excellent relationships with other language schools. For example, if a student comes to you looking for a program that you do not offer, why not refer him to a nearby school that does offer that type of program? Even better, give the student the name and phone number of a person there who can help him out. That way, you won't be sending the student on a wild goose chase, but you will be giving him a solid lead.

Moreover, you will be giving the other school an excellent referral. In return, you can ask that your colleagues send students to you, if they can't help them.

In order for this to happen effectively, you will need to stay informed about what programs are offered by other schools and how you can help each other succeed.

77

Market to the people paying the way

If your program is filled with students whose parents pay for their tuition, you want to include parents in your target market. As you design your brochures and website, look at it from the point of view both of a student and a parent.

One way to market to parents is to translate your marketing materials into their language. (See Idea 16: Sell yourself in as many languages as possible) Other ways to sell parents on your program are:

- Focus on the family values of your host families.
- Give details about any medical or accident insurance that is included in the price of tuition.
- Talk about how you care for students who become sick or get injured during your program. Do you have anyone on 24-hour call for emergencies? Give examples of how you take care of your students.
- If your city is clean and safe, talk about that in your marketing materials.

Convince parents that their children will be safe and cared for while they are studying with you and they will be more likely to want to send their children to you.

78

Follow exceptional service standards

Respond to requests for information within 24 hours or less. If you want to attract students to your program you need to let them know that they – and their needs – matter to you. By responding to their requests for information quickly, you will be offering them excellent customer service and building a rapport with them.

If you match or surpass your competition in client service, you are more likely to acquire and maintain registrations.

While automated e-mail replies are fine to respond to electronic inquiries, remember to make it personal. Include the name and contact information of a real person who works in your office who the student can contact for more information. There is nothing more frustrating than hitting walls of technology when what you want is to talk to a person. Learning a language is a human activity and so, should be marketed using technology tempered with a human touch.

79

Create a student ambassador program

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines an ambassador as "a representative or promoter of a specified thing". You could also add that ambassadors often embody the qualities of diplomacy, understanding, patience and knowledge about that which they represent. Student ambassadors can represent your program for you in their home countries.

Imagine that you have an inquiry from a student in Thailand or Uruguay or some other country where you may not focus a large percentage of your marketing dollars. Now imagine that after you have provided the prospect with all the necessary details, you could say to him, "We had a student from your country study in our program. She would be happy to talk to you about her experience. Let me give you her name and phone number..."

The prospect can talk to your alumnus in his own language and get a first-hand account of how good your program is.

Your student ambassadors can be hand-picked to ensure that the most positive, diplomatic people are chosen to represent your program. You want people who are well spoken, bright and level-headed. You can ask students to volunteer to be your program ambassadors. They can add the experience to their c.v. or resume as international volunteer experience. Student ambassadors can be excellent representatives and recruiters for your program!

Part Seven: Continue marketing while your students are enrolled

80

Meet your students at the airport

When students arrive at the airport they will be tired from travelling. They may have no idea how to get to the school, a hotel room or their host family's home. By greeting them at the airport you can begin to establish a rapport with them even before they get to the school.

Be sure to have a sign with the student's name printed on it clearly and be sure you are wearing a big smile. Introduce yourself and welcome them to your city.

They will be grateful to see the smiling face of someone who is there to help them and whom they feel they can trust. Help them with their bags, ask if they need anything and then take them where they need to go. This is a prime opportunity to bond with students and lay the foundation for a lasting relationship.

107

81

Greet your students with a welcome package

In today's world, information is power. Arm your students with information that will make their stay with you more enjoyable. A welcome package may contain such things as:

- class schedules
- city map
- bus or metro guides / maps
- coupons for local businesses (See Idea 83: Partner with local businesses)
- information on upcoming special events
- a list of emergency phone numbers (police, fire, ambulance, etc.)

Avoid overwhelming students with too much information, but do provide them with practical info that will help to orient them and make them feel safe and welcome.

82

Make sure your students receive a comprehensive orientation upon arrival (complete with refreshments)

Make your students feel welcome and comfortable by giving them a complete orientation upon arrival including:

- an overview of the course schedule
- a review of the rules and regulations of the program
- a discussion about expectations for student behaviour and performance
- a tour of the school (including an indication of where their classes will be held, administration offices, bathrooms, cafeteria, etc.)
- an indication of how to use public transit and where the closest stops are

Remember that students may be jet lagged from their trip. Provide as much information in writing, so students can review it at their leisure. Also, be sure to provide refreshments. Not only will this increase the interest level in what is going on around them, but it will also serve to keep students hydrated and comfortable.

83

Partner with local businesses

Local restaurants, bookstores, souvenir shops, movie theatres and tourist attractions all stand to gain from your students going to their establishments. You can work together with local businesses to encourage students to buy their products and services. In return, students receive a discount in the form of a coupon that they can use on one of their visits there.

Businesses may already have coupons that they use for other purposes. If so, all they need to do is provide you with enough coupons to distribute to your students. If they don't, offer to print a special one for them, complete with their business logo and your school logo, for this special promotion to your students.

Partnerships can be established in many ways. You may want to start with an introductory letter telling them about your school and saying that you are looking to partner with select businesses in the community.

Then, follow up with a phone call a week later. If the business shows interest, arrange to meet. Take brochures and promotional items to your meeting so the business owner can get an idea what kind of programs you offer and who your students are.

Once the partnership has been established, remember to stay in regular contact with the businesses. Send them information about upcoming classes and groups of students who are arriving. Create a sense of continuity and community around your business partnerships and they will thrive for years.

84

Let your students market for you

Collect testimonials from students and get their permission to use them. Testimonials from graduates of your program (complete with their photos) can have a huge impact on prospective students. These are the words of their peers, possibly even their countrymen. Prospects will tend to believe testimonials and respond to them on an emotional level. In turn, this can increase their desire to enroll in the program.

You want testimonials from a good cross-section of your student population. You want both men and women from various age groups and different countries to provide you with testimonials. If you have specialty programs, such as a teacher-training program, gather testimonials from participants of those particular programs, too.

Publish the testimonials in your brochures and on your website. Remember to update them at least once a year.

85

Celebrate local holidays with students

Imagine you are studying a language in a foreign country and a special holiday time arises. If it is a local holiday, you may be completely unfamiliar with the purpose and customs surrounding the day. Or if it is a holiday celebrated by various countries, you may know some of the customs, but not how it is celebrated in this particular place. Wouldn't it be great to have an opportunity to learn about local customs and traditions at your language school?

Festive events, decorations and even a brief description of the holiday posted on the main bulletin board can help students understand what is going on around them and make them feel a part of it.

In addition, you will be creating a sense of celebration and community, not to mention a few happy memories for your students. (See Idea 87: Create happy memories).

What are some upcoming events and holidays you can celebrate with your students? If you already celebrate holidays with students, how can you do it better? Use parties and festive events as learning and bonding opportunities for your students.

86

Create opportunities for your students

Although obviously students will come to you to learn a language, they also have other personal and professional interests. Think of ways you can create opportunities for students to get practical experience with the language and engage some of their other interests. Some options to explore are:

- volunteer work
- participation in special events
- job shadowing in the student's desired profession
- work co-op program
- professional events, conferences or luncheons
- resume-writing workshops
- informational interviews with people who work in the same field as the students
- tours of workplaces in your community (fire hall, police station, schools, etc.)

Opportunities like these go one step above and beyond group activities organized for all the students at your school. You can target or match opportunities to students' interests and needs. By making an effort to meet more than just the language-learning needs of your students, you will build rapport with them and leave them with useful experiences they will remember in a positive way.

87

Create happy memories

There's an old adage that says, "It's not what you say. It's not what you do. It's how you make people feel that counts." This is especially true in marketing. Not only do you need to focus on having the best quality education for your students, you want them to feel good about being in your program.

How do your students feel on a daily basis? Do you get regular complaints about teachers, the course material, the homestays or other aspects of the program? Of course, there are complainers in every crowd, but in general, you want to ensure that your students are happy and satisfied so they will encourage others to take part in the program.

How do you create happy memories for students? Here are some suggestions:

- Celebrate their successes.
- Give them opportunities to stretch their boundaries through safe activities that may be new for them.
- Create opportunities for laughter and fun in classes.
- Listen to them if they come to you with a problem.
- Have a zero-tolerance policy for violence and abuse in your school. Problems must be handled respectfully.
- Reward achievement.
- Remind staff and instructors to smile at students, say hello to them often and make them feel welcome at all times.

The more happy memories you create for students, the more referrals they will send you.

88

Make a "brag board" or "wall of fame"

A fantastic way to create a sense of pride among your students is to dedicate a bulletin board in a pubic area (i.e. not a classroom or office) to show off their successes. Did one of them try a new activity for the first time (climbing a mountain, swimming, starting a campfire) and do it successfully? Put up a photo. Who got the highest grades in the class? Put up a notice to congratulate that person. Did somebody get a new job or volunteer opportunity? Post the good news!

Of course, it is best to get your students' permission to showcase their successes on your brag board. Most likely, they'll be surprised and flattered that you even asked.

Change your brag board on a regular basis (i.e. every Thursday morning) and you will find students and teachers taking time to look at it often.

A brag board helps to create a sense of community and positive reinforcement. Even if students don't know everyone whose good news is posted, they will know that the successes of their classmates are important and recognized. You will build a sense of loyalty and pride in your program.

89

Have students fill out a course evaluation

Course evaluations are excellent tools. They give you important information about how students perceived various aspects of the course. If you already have a course evaluation, review it to ensure that it includes information to help you market your course better. A comprehensive course evaluation will include questions about the quality and students' perception of:

- instruction
- learning materials
- learning activities and excursions
- fairness of testing (if tested on material they learned in class)
- scheduling
- host family / residence experience

It will also include:

- demographic information (age, country of origin, education)
- information on where they found out about the course
- overall rating students would give your course
- examples of things students particularly liked
- suggestions for improvement

From the course evaluations you can gather valuable insights that can help you improve both your program and your marketing approach.

90

Present students with a certificate or diploma upon successful completion of the course

Not only does a certificate show completion of the course, but it also gives students a tangible record of their participation that they are not likely to throw away.

Students will feel great when they shake your hand, see your smiling face, hear the words "Congratulations!" or "Well done!" and finally, receive their certificates. See how many senses are used in that one brief experience? You want to create that bond and the feeling of pride in students. By celebrating their success, you leave your students with a great feeling about themselves and your program.

This feeling will help them say positive things to others about their experience. Small gestures such as giving a certificate can lay the foundation for excellent word-of-mouth marketing.

91

Ask students and alumni to tell their friends and family about the program

In your farewell or graduation speech, ask your students to tell others about the program. This sounds like an obvious idea, but you might be surprised how few people do it. If you ask, you are more likely to receive.

When you ask your students and alumni to tell others about the program, they may agree and make a mental note to do so. Once that happens, they are much more likely to follow through with it, because they have made a mental agreement with you.

If you don't feel comfortable announcing it in public (still the best way, in my opinion) you can print the request in your newsletter. Choose simple wording that includes a call for direct action. A "3-yes" approach works well. This entails asking two rhetorical questions to which your listeners are likely to answer yes. This will set up a pattern of "yes" answers. You can then ask the third and most important question and probably get a yes to that, too.

Here's an example:
"Did you learn a lot in our program? Did you have a great time and meet new friends? Would you help us to expand our program by telling your friends and family about your positive experiences at our school? We all know that word of mouth is the best way to grow a program. Tell other about your experience studying with us, so more people can enjoy and benefit from the experience, too."

This approach includes the "3-yes" approach and a direct call for action. It could easily be worked in to a farewell speech from a school director.

92

As soon as students have successfully completed one level, invite them to register in the next level

Sometimes, a simple invitation to do something is enough to motivate people to take action. Students may or may not be thinking about registering in the next level, but if you invite them to do so, they will certainly start thinking about it.

This is probably one tactic that works best if a soft approach is used. Work the invitation into casual conversation, "We'd love it if you would stay with us for one more course. I invite you to register in the next level."

Start inviting students to return as soon as it is clear that they will be eligible for enrollment in the next level. You do not have to wait until they receive their certificates of completion. The earlier you reasonably plant the seed, the more time you give it to grow. Some students may end up registering once they know their friends have already made the decision to do so. Invite as many students as possible to return.

Instructors and activity leaders can be recruited to invite students to register in the next level, too. Anyone working in the program can incorporate simple invitations into their everyday conversations with students.

93

Offer incentive for students to register in the next level as soon as possible

After casually inviting students to register in the next level (see Idea 92: As soon as students have successfully completed one level, invite them to register in the next level) you can step up your recruitment campaign with an announcement to the class that goes something like this: "You will receive 10% off the price of tuition if you register in the next level by the end of the week!"

This may be the one hook for anyone who is still trying to decide.

To avoid hurt feelings of anyone who may have already registered and to avoid the administrative nightmare of refunding 10% of their money you can keep everybody happy with an arrangement such as: "If you have already registered this week for the next level, you are ineligible for this special deal. But because you mean so much to us, you will receive the same value in gift certificates to our favorite local bookstore / music store / café."

You may be able to get these gift certificates for free (see Idea 83: Partner with local businesses). That way, you can keep everyone happy, bring a local business more sales and it won't cost you a penny!

Part Eight: How to keep marketing once your program is finished

94

Follow up with a thank you letter to your students

Just as follow up is important when we are *talking about* prospective clients (see Idea 47: Lead the way by following up with all contacts) it is just as important to follow up with students.

A short, one-page letter thanking students will keep you fresh in their minds. A simple example would be: "Thank you for taking part in our program. We were delighted to have you study with us. Your teachers, Mrs. Brown and Mr. Smith, send you warm greetings, as do all the program staff."

By adding a personal touch, such as mentioning the names of the teachers who taught in the program, you will be personalizing the letter. Not only will it be less of a form letter, but you will also trigger memories of the teachers and the classes in your students' minds.

They will reflect on the program and remember the positive experiences they had with you. The longer you can keep these positive feelings aroused, the more likely students are to talk about the program to others, thus marketing it for you by word of mouth.

95

Include a percentage-off coupon with your thank you letter

Coupons are a great way to build good will and offer an incentive for students to register in future courses. If you state that coupons can also be passed on to family members or friends, you are opening the door for new people to enter your program.

Typically, a percentage off coupon would still allow you to cover all your expenses and make some money. Depending on your program, 5-10% will be sufficient.

Also, include a reasonable expiration date on your coupon to give students even more incentive to use it before it is too late.

96

Create an alumni network

Once students leave your program, it is to your advantage to stay in touch with them. If you keep a personal connection to them, they are more likely to keep telling others about the program. They may even want to register again in the future.

One way to stay in touch with former students is to create an alumni network, where students can stay in touch with one another and with you. Your website is the perfect arena for this. You can either make it private by giving all alumni a password (thus creating an air of exclusivity and increasing security) or by making it public (less secure and possibly an interesting space for prospects to visit.)

Your alumni network can include:

- names of alumni, listed under their year and class
- chat rooms where students can stay in touch
- updates about students (Where are they now? What are they doing? Who got married? Who had children? etc.)
- updates about program staff and faculty (Who has moved on? Who is new at the school? etc.)
- notices about upcoming events and courses

Chances are, many students will want to stay in touch with each other. By creating a forum, you not only create a space for many students to stay connected to each other, you are also adding an opportunity to market your upcoming courses to them.

i24

97

Make students and alumni feel special

Another way to stay in touch with alumni and students is to send them a birthday card signed by the program staff. You can use your database to generate reports prior to the beginning of each month telling you who has a birthday coming up. (See Idea 40: Develop a database that can be a marketing gold mine.)

This is also an opportunity to include notices about upcoming courses, but it should be your secondary purpose. The primary purpose of sending the card is to let students know that you remember them and are thinking about them.

98

Brainstorm with staff and teachers on how to improve your program

No one knows your program better than the people who work for it. Plan a staff and faculty meeting with the express purpose of generating ideas to improve your program and its marketing.

Depending on the size of your staff, you may be able to divide people into teams and have each team brainstorm their own ideas. Then you can share all the ideas on flip charts or a blackboard.

Not only will this exercise open you to new ideas about how to make your program the best that it can be; it will also give your staff and instructors the message that their input is important to the program. They will feel valued and happier about their experience working with you. There may be the odd person who resists this type of activity. Hopefully such people will realize that they are the odd ones out if they choose to have a bad attitude or not contribute.

This activity can be an extremely valuable exercise in generating ideas that you can later develop into a plan. People who offer the ideas are more likely to help put them into action.

99

Review your program's successes and failures over the past year

At the end of your year, conduct a review of what was and was not successful. Write everything down. Whether you do it in two columns on one sheet of paper or on different sheets of paper, write everything down so that when you reflect upon it, you have a clear idea about what worked and what didn't.

This review process may take a few days or even a couple of weeks. Don't let it drag on too long, but do give enough time to conduct a thorough review. Go ahead and ask trusted program staff and instructors what they would add to the lists. Above all else, be honest in your evaluation.

You can highlight your successes in your annual report or newsletter. As for things that could have gone better, think about how they can be improved. Ask yourself, how can we have a better program next year?

Keep your lists from year to year. That way, you can see how you have been able to turn negatives into positives and keep your program going. You will also be able to identify anything that is repeated from year to year. This may be an indication that these things require special attention.

The idea is to be conscious of what you are doing from year to year and use all the information to your advantage.

100

Review your marketing and sales over the past year. Did you reach all your goals?

At the beginning of this book we suggested that you set some goals for your program. (See Idea 3: Set reasonable goals). At the end of the year, review your enrollments, revenue and other data. Did you reach or surpass your goals? If so, great. If not, have another look at your goals. Were they realistic?

If you had a reasonable goal, such as increasing your enrollment by 10% and it only increased by 5%, you want to ask yourself and your team if there was anything you could have done differently to ensure that you reached that goal?

It may take more than one year to achieve certain goals. Having capacity enrollment in a new or specialized program is one example. If that is the case, stay positive and keep the same goal in mind for next year.

By keeping track of your goals, your efforts to meet them and your results, you will steer yourself towards success in the long run.

101

Plan ahead for next year

Once you have reviewed your past year, you will be in a position to develop your marketing plan for next year. When you build your plan, look not only at your goals, but also your budget and people power. Remember to:

- Budget accurately for electronic, print and all other marketing materials and endeavours. (Use last year's figures plus 10% as a rough guide.)
- Plan what trade fairs or missions you would like to attend based on your target market area.
- Decide which publications you want to target with your advertising.
- Decide which conferences or professional events you and your staff/faculty plan to participate in.
- Decide when you will start your various direct mail campaigns. (It is best to stagger your mailouts so staff doesn't get burnt out and you spread the expense out over the year.)

Write your plan down in such a way that it is clear and concise. You want to be able to refer back to it throughout the year to ensure you are on track.

Also, your plan can include your goals for next year. If you focus your plan and efforts on meeting your goals, you will position yourself for even greater success next year.

Suggested Reading List

I encourage you to continue to build your knowledge about marketing. There are dozens of excellent books on the subject. Here are a few of my favorites that I would recommend:

Bender, Peter Urs and George Torok. *Secrets of Power Marketing*. Toronto. Stoddart Publishing Co. Ltd. 1999.

Debelak, Don. *Marketing Magic: Innovative and Proven Ideas for Finding Customers, Making Sales, and Growing your Business*. An Adams Business Advisor. Holbrook, MA, Bob Adams Inc. 1994.

Grede, Robert. *Naked Marketing: The Bare Essentials*. Paramus, NJ. Prentice Hall. 1997.

Levinson, Jay Conrad and Charles Rubin. *Guerilla Marketing Handbook*. New York. Houghton Mifflin Co. 1994.

Levinson, Jay Conrad and Charles Rubin. *Guerilla Marketing Online: The Entrepreneur's Guide to Earning Profits on the Internet*. 2nd edition. New York. Houghton Mifflin Co. 1997.

Wiersema, Fred. *The New Market Leaders: Who's Winning and How in the Battle for Customers*. New York. The Free Press. 2001.

Withers, Jean and Carol Vipperman. *Marketing your Service*. 3rd edition. Self-Counsel Business Series. North Vancouver. Self-Counsel Press Ltd. 1988.

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About the author

Sarah Elaine Eaton has a B.A. in English from Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia and an M.A. in Spanish from the University of Calgary, Alberta. She is the founder and president of Eaton International Consulting (EIC) Inc. (2001), a company specializing educational programming and marketing. She was the University of Calgary's first English Language Program Coordinator in the Faculty of Continuing Education from 1997-2001. In her first year on the job she developed and coordinated a marketing plan that tripled enrollment in the program.

She has also worked with the Universidad Católica de Honduras, to help them design a Spanish language program for foreigners.

Since starting EIC Inc. in 2001, Sarah has worked with Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton, Alberta to help them market their English as a Second Language Program and Chinook College in Calgary, Alberta. In addition, she was the project manager for the development University of Calgary's first online classes in English as a Second Language. This project is associated with the Englishworld.ca, a consortium led by the University of Victoria, comprised of four Western Canadian Universities who joined forces to offer a comprehensive online English as a Second Language program.

Sarah also teaches credit courses in Spanish at Mount Royal College in Calgary, Alberta. She is a writer and public speaker who has given presentations and workshops in both Spanish and English to audiences of up to 1000 people in Canada, Cuba, Honduras and Spain.

She is available to give presentations, workshops and keynote addresses to your group about educational marketing.

"I was very impressed with the marketing plan Sarah developed for our department. She followed the principles outlined in her book and wrote a very practical, easy to follow report on the necessary steps for developing our market in Mexico. I learned a lot from working with her."

Liz Karra, Coordinator, Canadian English Language Institute, Grant MacEwan College

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